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MEXICAN BIRD, RARE IN STATES,
DOING WELL ON WILDLIFE REFUGE

Mexican chachalacas, birds native to the United States only in southern Texas, strangely enough thrive on the Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of Georgia, according to a recent Fish and Wildlife Service report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. The Blackbeard flock and another on nearby Sapeloe Island (which is privately owned) were introduced by the late Howard Coffin about 15 years ago, the report explained.

How many chachalacas are now on the Blackbeard Refuge is not known, but Oscar Goodwin, patrolman-laborer who resides on the area, believes that at least 25 of these exotic birds live on the island. During the past year he has seen that many at different places on the 5,000-acre wildlife sanctuary in groups of 2, 3, or 4, but no larger.

A gallinaceous bird, the chachalaca is related to the pheasants, quails, and turkeys. An adult chachalaca is about the size of a half-grown Leghorn chicken and is dusky olive in coloration. The birds are noisy and the common name is an imitation of the usual cry.

At least two lots of birds were brought to Sapeloe Island and those resident now appear to have resulted from the second introduction. These

birds were specimens obtained from native families in Guatemala and Mexico by a representative of the Biological Survey and a dealer in animals. These people are noted for their success in making pets and the birds brought to Sapeloe were so tame that they would climb all over anyone permitting it, several of the birds being upon a person at one time.

The birds were keen to pick at shiny objects such as buttons and also made passes at the eyes which had to be guarded against. Their very tameness was a bar to success of the introduction as they were easy victims for predators. Apparently a few of them became wary just in time to succeed in the new environment. As they spend most of their time in trees, thoroughly wild birds doubtless are able to take care of themselves even in the midst of numerous possible enemies.

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